11: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1958
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III. SHAMANISM AND SORCERY

753 The problems of illness, accident, and death are commonly conceived in supernatural terms by primitive peoples, and the techniques for their resolution are accordingly the province of religious practitioners. The supernatural dangers threatening the Munduruté currently preoccupy the society more than any other aspect of the supernatural realm, for they constitute the cause of all sickness and death; and epidemic disease has beset the Munduruté since their first contact with Europeans. But the Munduruté do not feel broken and powerless before the onslaughts of ailments to which they have little natural immunity. Mystical in nature though the evil may be, it is not mysterious, for it can be explained and controlled. The threat is no less concrete for existing on a level of reality beyond the sensory powers of ordinary mortals, but the protection of the society must, therefore, rest in the hands of persons who are able to see and act in this sphere. These individuals are viewed by the Munduruté as the possessors of great and manifestly beneficial power, although they recognize the corollary principle that this power is potentially dangerous and corrupting.

The Shaman

756 The Munduruté shaman, or *pajé*, has the ability to deal with supernatural threats through possession of a mystical power latent within him from the time of his birth. His functions within the society are manifold. The shaman performs cures; he is essential to nearly all ceremonies; he propitiates the spirit mothers of the animal world, he rids the community of evil forces, and he can detect lost people and objects. But through essential to the well-being of society, the power of the shaman can be used for evil ends. His status is ambivalent; he maintains a balanced and favorable relation between the human and supernatural worlds, and he is capable of profoundly disturbing this balance.

Most Munduruté villages have at least one shaman in residence, although some have none. The shaman has high prestige, although the respect accorded an individual practitioner is at times mixed with fear when it is suspected that he indulges in black magic. In spite of the high regard in which he is held, he receives no material benefits for his services. Among the more acculturated Munduruté, a [--- 3]
[illegible] to be of recent origin and obtains in only a minority of cases. The shaman does not devote full time to his specialty. All practitioners hunt, fish, and clear gardens with the other men and manufacture baskets, bows, and other objects.

The shaman frequently makes great personal sacrifices in the performance of his duties. Some travel great distances to treat those who are too ill to come to them, and they often make these trips to the detriment of other activities and tasks. The practice is considered dangerous, for the shaman must face the dual menace of contact with hostile spirits and the suspicion of his fellowmen. But most Munduruté shamans are motivated by a true sense of public service. They feel that they possess a great power that can be used both for good and bad ends and be-